

Courses, courses

Research shows union knowledge combined with union muscle makes working a much, much, healthier pursuit (*Hazards* 74). TUC education's **Graham Petersen** describes the trade union training programmes that make organised, educated union reps life-savers in the workplace.

The trade union movement can be proud of its record on the training of union representatives. TUC general secretary John Monks has described training as "the flagship service" and the way that most trade unionists "first make real contact with the TUC."

Most of this training is provided by the TUC Education Service. In 1999 alone, the service trained 30,512 union representatives, with the TUC's national network of 209 tutors running 2,605 courses.

The TUC programme took off in the mid-1970s with the passing of the Employment Protection Act 1975 and the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977. These laws provided the legal right to attend TUC or union approved courses with no loss of pay.

The health and safety programme has been a huge success, something confirmed by recent Health and Safety Executive-backed research (see pages 8-9). This is because union safety training is built on important principles:

- ◆ It is independent. The courses focus on how the safety representative can get the best possible standards for their members. This is achieved because there is little joint training with management. A union-only course can emphasise the trade union approach to health and safety.
- ◆ Shared experience. Many courses bring reps together from different employers and different unions. This means they get an opportunity to compare best practice and develop their understanding beyond their own immediate workplace.
- ◆ Practical and skills based. The courses stress the importance of problem



Safety reps can keep a close eye on company safety performance.

solving skills. Reps develop action plans to use on real problems back at work. This helps to ensure that the training is both interesting and relevant.

- ◆ Collective approach. The methods used are built on one of the principles of the trade union movement – helping each other out. Unlike other health and safety courses that are based on lectures and exams, TUC training is centred on active learning methods which encourage a collective approach through group working rather than individual testing.
- ◆ Regional delivery. The programme is run by a network of colleges and

Workers Education Associations in the TUC regions. This means that most reps do not have huge distances to travel and helps make the courses cost effective and convenient.

It is important that these principles continue to underpin the programme. For this to happen there will be a need to protect and expand the funding. Successive governments have under-funded further education to the point where provision in some colleges is at risk.

More training

One of the reasons why the TUC programme has been successful is because it has adapted to changing demand without moving

Risks

Web child of *Hazards* magazine earns "superb" plaudits

Risks, the new web-based health and safety weekly edited by *Hazards* for the TUC, has won an international award. The "e-zine" was described by the international trade union news service *Labourstart* as "a really superb online resource."

Risks, the first weekly UK safety e-zine, has in its first two months secured not just the *Labourstart* website award, but has gained over 1,500 subscribers.

Eric Lee, international union internet guru and editor of *Labourstart*, said **TUC Risks** "should be of interest to trade unionists everywhere, as health and safety is a global concern for all of us, but **Risks** goes out of its way to look at the international side of things."

Risks online: www.tuc.org.uk/risks
Also see *Hazards* online: www.hazards.org

away from the underlying principles. There are a number of developments that could contribute to the future success of the programme.

Employment tribunals

Many reps do not attend the courses because of problems obtaining release from work. There have recently been two significant tribunal decisions unions can use to support

requests for paid release.

Rama v South West Trains – this was a High Court ruling that the company’s decision on time-off for union safety training should have been based on what was “reasonable” rather than what they considered “necessary” in relation to release for a Stage 2 course (*Hazards* 61).

Catten v Dept of Social Security – this was an Employment Tribunal decision based on the above, but in relation to a Stage 3 (OSH Certificate) course (*Hazards* 74).

On-line training

The TUC is offering a number of its courses as a distance learning option. This is not intended as an alternative to the day release programme, but would assist those reps who do not have easy access to a trade union studies centre. TUC *Learnonline* has been successfully used for union health and safety training in a pilot scheme, and is being expanded. You can see a demo at: www.learnonline.org.uk

Union Learning Reps

The proposals to provide statutory support for reps promoting the training agenda could be used to extend health and safety training. Find out more at the TUC learning webpages: www.tuc.org.uk/learning/index.cfm

Revitalising Health and Safety

The government’s targets for reducing accidents can be used by unions to argue for

more resources for training (*Hazards* 71).

HSE funding

The TUC has been able to carry out a number of initiatives as a result of funding support. These include new body mapping course materials (also see *Hazards* 60, 61, 71 and 74; online at www.hazards.org/DIYresearch/); research into the impact of TUC training (see pages 8-9); updates on Stages 1 and 2; and the Certificate and COSHH courses.

Progression routes

The accreditation of courses has enabled reps to obtain Open College Network credits. These can be used to access other courses. The Certificate course provides a link to membership to IOSH, the main safety professional organisation in the UK. This has encouraged reps to progress through the programme and provides recognition of the high quality work carried out.

New legal standards

The proposals for new law, particularly in relation to safety rep rights – to be spelled out in the forthcoming government “Safety Bill”, due later this year – may provide the basis for new training initiatives, particularly if rights to roving safety reps (page 10) and provisional improvement notices (though the government has been less than warm about PINs – see *Hazards* 76 special report, next issue) are included.

Learning about TUC learning

The TUC Education Service offers a range of courses for trade union safety reps.

Course: Stage 1 health and safety course

Time commitment: 60 hours of guided learning (usually 10 days of day release, a day per week)

Course content:

- ◆ Role and functions of the trade union health and safety rep
- ◆ Organising for health and safety
- ◆ Preventing accidents and ill-health
- ◆ Skills for safety reps
- ◆ Planning for the future

Course: Stage 2 health and safety course

Time commitment: 60 hours of guided learning

Course content:

- ◆ Building a safe and healthy workplace
- ◆ Building health and safety organisation
- ◆ Keeping up-to-date on health and safety
- ◆ Effecting change in health and safety
- ◆ Planning for the future

Course: Short course programme

Time commitment: Two to five days

Course content: Short courses can cover a range of subjects in response to national developments and local demand. Examples include:

- ◆ Risk assessment
- ◆ Stress at work
- ◆ Bullying at work
- ◆ Violence at work
- ◆ COSHH
- ◆ Body mapping
- ◆ Training for HSC Advisory Committee members

Course: TUC Certificate in Occupational Safety and Health

Time commitment: One day or two evenings per week for 36 weeks, plus work in own time.

Course content: The course is designed to develop an understanding of health and safety principles and practice. There are modules on:

- ◆ Health and safety organisation
- ◆ Health and safety law
- ◆ Health, safety, welfare and the environment
- ◆ Range of skills including those focused on a project

The certificate at OCN level 3 is accredited to meet the academic requirement for IOSH Technician Safety Practitioner membership, a professional safety qualification.

Safe course of action
 Check with your Regional TUC about health and safety training opportunities near you. If you have done most of the courses on offer then see if you can get a colleague interested. Don't forget this training is free of charge for union members. Take advantage of it now.

Scotland
 Larry Cairns, 0141 221 8545, email lcairns@tuc.org.uk

Northern/Yorkshire and Humberside
 Bill Adams, 0113 242 9296, email: badams@tuc.org.uk

North West
 Pete Holland, 0151 236 7678, email: pholland@tuc.org.uk

The Midlands
 Tom Cook, 0121 236 4464, email: tcook@tuc.org.uk

Southern and Eastern
 Maggie Foy, 020 7467 1238, email: mfoy@tuc.org.uk

Wales and South West
 Julie Cook, 029 2022 7449, email: jcook@tuc.org.uk

Northern Ireland
 Tom Moore, 01232 681726

The TUC learning webpages include details of courses, locations and your rights to training. www.tuc.org.uk/learning/index.cfm